Full-time Trade Union Leaders & the Societal Context: The Bosses & Deputies

Pravin J. Patel

The weakness of the contemporary trade union movement is mostly attributed to the introduction of economic reforms and new labor practices of the post-liberalization era. This, however, neglects the role of the trade union leaders and the social milieu in which they functioned. Based on a micro-level study of full-time trade union leaders of the pre-liberal period of Baroda city, Gujarat, this paper argues: (i) the social milieu constricted the influence of full-time leaders and (ii) the trade union leadership constituted an influence structure, consisting of a hierarchy of leaders designated as 'Bosses' and 'Deputies'.

Introduction

In the post-liberal India the triumph of capital over labor, as indicated by the introduction of several anti-labor practices, has weakened the once powerful trade union movement and worsened the socio-economic conditions of working class (Sheth, 1993; Sodhi, 2014). According to the World Labor Report 1997–98 of the ILO the trade union membership in India as a percentage of non-agricultural labor slumped from 6.6 percent in 1985 to 5.5 percent in 1995, and union membership as a percentage of formal sector workers dropped from 26.5 percent to 22.8 percent (Bhattacharjee, 1999: 31, 2001:259).

Albeit, Indian trade union movement was never revolutionary, however, it was acquiring some momentum before the liberalization, as the number of strikes more than doubled between 1961 and 1974 at all-India level (Ahn, 2010:39). Indeed, in the post-liberal era also there have been a number of nation-wide strikes, demonstrations, and struggles protesting against neo-liberal policies of the government. But most of them were in the public sector units and were unsuccessful (Shyam Sundar, 2010: 589–95; 2015). Moreover, the industrial disputes since mid-1990's largely involved

individual, isolated, and independent plant-level unions and on the whole the unions' bargaining power has declined after liberalization (Chakrabarty & Dhar, 2008:73).

Why the Indian trade union movement, which was so powerful before the economic reforms (Ramaswamy, 1988; Sodhi, 2013: 175; Titlebaum, 2009), succumbed to the forces of liberalization, privatization, and globalization without posing a serious challenge? Mostly, this post-liberal docility of the Indian trade unions is attributed to the introduction of new labor practices such as recruitment-freeze, outsourcing, increasing use of contract workers, freedom to hire and fire, liberty to close industrial undertakings, soft labor inspection system, permissiveness to introduce labor saving technologies, repeal of legal provisions regarding bonus, 'voluntary retirement schemes' (VRS), and privatization of nonviable public enterprises. This paper examines the conundrum by focusing on the role of full-time trade union leaders, also known as 'outsiders', in the pre-liberal era.

Full-time Trade Union Leaders

Leadership is important in the trade union movement across the world. However, the distinguishing feature of the Indian trade union movement has been the two broad types of leaders, namely, 'outsiders' and 'insiders'. Those who initiated and developed the movement in India were not regular factory workers or employees. Instead, they were social workers or politicians who became full-time trade union leaders and were financially supported by their unions. Such leaders are generally known as 'outsiders', and are usually associated with one or the other national federation of the trade unions, functioning under the umbrella of a political party. The dominance of these politically oriented outsiders over the trade union movement in India has been a much discussed issue (Karnik, 1978; Ramaswamy, 1973; 1974; 1977; Rothemund, 1981).

> **The Indian trade union movement before liberalization was very much vibrant, aggressive, and politically quite influential.**

Many critical observers maintain that the outside leaders were responsible for the politicization of the movement, multiple unions, inter-union rivalry, and other such debilitating consequences (Shyam Sundar, 2008: 168–69). Such critics, however, generally underplay the fact that despite all its limitations, the Indian trade union movement before liberalization was very much vibrant, aggressive, and politically quite influential (Ramaswamy, 1988; Titlebaum, 2009). Moreover, they also ignore the constricting role of the sociopolitical milieu on the trade union leadership evident at a micro-level, which is the actual arena of industrial relations. This paper, therefore,

examines the role of fulltime trade union leaders at the grass roots level, with reference to Baroda (now Vadodara), an industrial city of Gujarat, and highlights the curbing impact of the pre-liberal socio-political context on their leadership role. To focus sharply on the leadership role performed by the outsiders and its bearing on the trade union movement at the grassroots level, the paper underscores the internal differentiation found among them, by highlighting two main strata among them, namely, 'Bosses' and 'Deputies'. This distinction between the bosses and the deputies not only accentuates the societal constraints but also illuminates Robert Merton's conception of the influence structure, which implies not only a hierarchy of leaders but also a chain of influence (Merton, 1968:441–74).

The Context

The trade union movement of Baroda city, as elsewhere, has been shaped by a constellation of historical, socio-political, and economic forces. Although, the industrialization began by the late 19th century in the city, it did not flourish till the 1930s, when the city could boast of several factories apart from a few services. The city's working class was nebulous but the economic hardships caused by the First World War, and mobilization of the industrial workers elsewhere in India, stimulated the working-class movement in the city. In the early phase until the Independence, the working class movement in Baroda was confined mainly to its textile workers, organized by the Majur Mahajan, a trade union formed by the Gandhians committed to the ideology of industrial peace and class collaboration.[1] Albeit, the communists, believing in class conflict, also attempted to unionize the workers of the city, under the *Lal Vavta* (Red Flag) banner, their influence was limited (Patel, 2011). Immediately after Independence, two major trade union federations were active in the city, namely, All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) of the communists and the newly formed Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) of the Indian National Congress, with which the Majur Mahajan was affiliated. Later, in the post-Independence period, with the increasing industrialization the non-textile sector was enlarged. Consequently, the non-textile and white-collar workers were also increasingly unionized. During the late 1960s Indian polity was fractured causing a division of the then dominant Congress Party and a split in the Communist Party of India. Consequently, several national federations of the trade unions, formed by various political parties came into existence, in addition to the already existing AITUC and INTUC, such as Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), Centre

[1] The Majur Mahajan, also known as the Textile Labor Association (TLA), was affiliated to INTUC formed by the Indian National Congress, immediately after the latter's formation in 1947.

of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), and National Labor Organization (NLO) (Karnik, 1978).[2] These federations set up their branches all over the country, including Baroda. Thus, by the early 1980s the city had 64 trade unions, affiliated with the local branches of the six national federations. Of these six national federations, Majur Mahajan, now affiliated with the NLO, had a monopoly hold over the textile workers, who constituted the bulk of the city's working class; having a very limited influence on the non-textile workers. The remaining five federations, having negligible influence on the textile workers, concentrated on organizing the non-textile workers. The non-textile workers, mostly employed in small or medium sized units, were scattered in multitude of units dispersed all over the city and its periphery. Therefore, their unions were relatively small, having limited resources. The competition among all the six federations to organize the non-textile workers augmented industrial conflicts and fragmented the movement due to the inter-union rivalry.

The Societal Milieu

The leaders do not function in social vacuum. Local socio-political culture of a city or region and macro level developments, significantly shape the configuration of industrial relations (Ramaswami, 1988). The social environment of Gujarat and India was characterized by: (i) competitive democratic polity and (ii) underdeveloped economy. The former promoted multi-party democracy, generating intense competition for political power, and politicizing almost all spheres of the society, including the trade union movement, and the latter determined the main goal of Indian society as economic development, social justice, and industrial peace.[3] While politicization of the labor movement caused by competitive polity resulted in inter-federation rivalry and the consequent fragmentation of the movement (Ramaswamy, 1971; 1972; 1973),

[2]In the late 1960s, the Indian National Congress was divided into two parties. One was Congress (I) popularly known as Indira Congress, later known as the Ruling Congress or Congress (R). In this paper it is referred to as Congress (I/R). Another was Congress O-or the Organizational Congress, loyal to the opponents of Indira Gandhi. After the split in Congress INTUC, excluding Majur Mahajan of Gujarat, remained loyal to the Congress (I/R). Congress (O) formed a new federation, namely, National Labor Organization (NLO) in 1972, and the Majur Mahajan became its fulcrum. Thus, Majur Mahajan was with INTUC up to 1971, and since 1972 it was affiliated to NLO. The newly founded Communist Party of India (Marxist) also formed its trade union federation Center for Indian Trade Unions (CITU) in 1970 (Shyam Sundar 2008: 160).

[3]The sole object of the labor and industrial relations legislation in post-independent India was to maintain peaceful industrial relations (Shyam Sunder, 2010: 585–87).

the state-centric legal framework empowered the state to frequently intervene in the disputes between the labor and capital, weakening thereby collective bargaining process (Mitchell, Mahy & Gahan, 2014, Chaudhury, 1996: 8–20; Hill 2009: 396–400). The societal milieu of Gujarat in general, and Baroda in particular, in which the leaders functioned, is examined here by focusing on (1) socio-political culture, and (ii) the legal framework.

The Socio-Political Culture

Ostensibly, the short-term goal of the different federations was common, namely, to solve the immediate work-and-wage related problems of the workers. However, all these federations legitimized their separate existence by articulating their long-term goals expressed in their respective political ideologies, ranging from Marxist (AITUC-CITU) to Socialist (HMS) to Gandhian (INTUC-Majur Nahajan/NLO) to Rightist-Nationalist (BMS). Besides, the 'Mahajani-Gandhian' socio-political culture of Gujarat, (Sheth, 2003), moderated the industrial relations, by emphasizing pragmatism, reconciliation, and class collaboration rather than class conflict, distinctively influencing the state's trade union movement. The influence of this culture on the state's polity was manifested in the dominance of the Congress Party from 1960 [4] through early 1970s, and also on the trade union movement, as the Gandhian trade union, Majur Mahajan (INTUC/NLO), politically aligned to the Gujarat Congress, dominated the labor scene of Gujarat during this period. Conversely, the non-Gandhian trade union federations such as AITUC, BMS, CITU, and HMS, formed by other political parties, remained relatively weak. Not surprisingly, the industrial relations in Gujarat were relatively peaceful almost up to the early 1970s. By the late 1970s, however, with the simultaneous decline of Congress Party, Majur Mahajan, and 'Mahjani-Gandhian' culture in Gujarat the number of industrial disputes increased.[5]

The non-Gandhian trade union federations such as AITUC, BMS, CITU, and HMS, formed by other political parties, remained relatively weak.

[4]Separate state of Gujarat was formed in 1960.

[5]In Gujarat, of the total industrial disputes occurring between 1961 and 1980,45% took place in the last five years i.e. between 1976 and 1980. Baroda was even more conflict-prone during this period as of the total disputes between 1961 and 1980,60% took place between 1976 and 1980 (Data were gleaned from Government of Gujarat's Gujarat Labor Gazette, between January 1961 and December 1980).

The Legal Framework

Legal framework of Gujarat trade unions mainly consisted of the following three laws: (i) Indian Trade Union Act, 1926, (ii) The Bombay Industrial Relations Act, 1946, and (iii) Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.

Trade Union Act (TU), 1926: The TU Act, 1926, under Section 4, permits registration of workers' unions and associations of employers for collective bargaining as minimum seven workers (or seven employees) can form a trade union and apply for its registration. This provision thus allows small, unviable, and multiple unions in a plant. Moreover, under Section 22 of the Act, at least 50 percent office-bearers of a union should be actually engaged or employed in the industry with which the trade union is concerned; the remaining 50 percent or less can be outsiders, such as lawyers, politicians, or social workers. Clearly, this provision allows the dominance of the outside leaders. The dominance of the outside leaders in Baroda city is reflected in the fact that only 25 full-time, paid, outside, trade union leaders held 147 of total 424 positions such as President, General Secretary, Secretary or Treasurer in the Executive Committees of the 64 trade unions, affiliated with the six federations. On an average, these 25 outside leaders held nearly six positions each. Thus, only 6 per cent officeholders occupied 35 percent offices. It was also common to find an outside leader holding the same office in all the unions of his federation. For instance, the late Murlidhar Ranalkar (HMS) was popularly known as *Mantri* (Secretary) among the members of the HMS unions, since he held the same position in all those unions. Evidently, power was concentrated in the hands of those outside leaders.[6] *Table 1* gives a classification of the 25 full timers of the 64 trade unions and their federations.

Table 1: Total Number of Unions & Outside Full-timers Associated with Six Federations

Sr. No	Federation	No. of Unions	No. of Outside Full timers
1	AITUC	14	5
2	BMS	16	3
3	CITU	2	5
4	INTUC	8	4

[6]Although there has been a legal provision for election of leaders in the unions, the elections were hardly held; mostly the same leaders were repeatedly nominated and declared as re-elected. This has been a common phenomenon in Indian trade unions (Aggarwal, 1972: Punckar & Madhuri, 1967; Shyan Sundar, 2008:168).

Sr. No	Federation	No. of Unions	No. of Outside Full timers
5	Majur Mahajan (NLO)	7	3
6	HMS	17	5
	Total	64	25

Bombay Industrial Relations (B.I.R.) Act, 1946: The B.I.R. Act, applicable to specified industries such as textiles, co-operative banks, sugar, power generation, etc. mainly in Gujarat and Maharashtra states, also considerably influenced the trade unions of the region. This Act prescribes recognition of a 'representative union' as the sole bargaining agent for an industry, in a specified local area. The Act also provides for statutory machinery to resolve industrial disputes through negotiation, conciliation, or arbitration by Labor Courts, Industrial Courts, or Wage Boards. It restricts strikes so severely that a 'legal' strike is virtually impossible in the industries covered under this Act (Bhattacharjee, 1989: M.70–1). Under this Act Majur Mahajan was recognized as the sole bargaining agent in the textile industry of Baroda city and the whole state. Hence, the Majur Mahajan had almost monopoly control over the major industry. This had two consequences:

(a) Majur Mahajan emerged as numerically strongest and financially affluent federation in Baroda city, as elsewhere in Gujarat, and

(b) the entire textile industry remained free from multiple trade unions, inter-union rivalry, and industrial conflict.

The Industrial Disputes (I.D.) Act, 1947: Unlike the B.I.R. Act, which is applicable mainly to Gujarat and Maharashtra states, the I.D. Act is applicable all over the country to all the other industries not included under the former. The principal object of I.D. Act is also to secure industrial peace by providing machinery for settlement of industrial disputes through collective bargaining, conciliation, and adjudication. Significantly, the I.D. Act, unlike the B.I.R. Act, does not have a provision for a 'representative union' to be recognized as the sole bargaining agent of employees across an industry or a particular region. Consequently, multiplicity of trade unions and inter-union rivalry were rampant in the industries covered under the Act, promoting small, unstable, and almost fragile trade unions. The Act also enhanced politicization of the movement, as it empowered the government to intervene in industrial relations (Bhattacharjee, 2001, Chaudhuri, 1996:12, Kennedy: 1966). Influence of the milieu was visible on the trade union leadership of Gujarat, making it a challenging and strenuous job.

Multiplicity of trade unions and inter-union rivalry were rampant in the industries covered under the Act, promoting small, unstable, and almost fragile trade unions.

Inadequate Monetary Rewards

Since most of the trade unions formed in the non-textile industries were small and financially weak, the honorarium paid to their full-timers was inadequate for a comfortable living. The Majur Mahajan, having absolute control over the textile workers of the city, was the only federation paying graded salary to its full-timers, regularly, with the benefits of provident fund and gratuity. Nevertheless, their monthly salary was much lower, in comparison to some of their well-paid followers. For instance, the head of the federation was paid about 750 rupees per month, which was much less than a jobber's salary in a textile mill. Therefore, one leader of the federation sarcastically remarked, "*Hum to jobber se bhi gaye*" (We are worse than the jobbers).[7]

Unsurprisingly, no leader of Majur Mahajan felt that his honorarium was adequate. In comparison to Majur Mahajan, the leaders of the other federations got meager honorarium, which was not even paid regularly. Mostly, they survived on the subsistence level, supported by their family members' income, as illustrated by the following excerpts from the interviews.

AITUC Leader said: "I earn about 400 rupees as monthly honorarium from my unions. My wife works as a midwife, earning about 300 rupees per month. Thus, our total monthly income is about 700 rupees, which is insufficient for my family of six members."

INTUC Leader: "When I left my job in 1976 to join the INTUC as a full-timer, my monthly income was more than 1000 rupees. Now, I get about 250 rupees as monthly honorarium from INTUC. Additionally, I get 100 rupees per individual case of the workers when I represent them in the labor court. Still, until recently, I had to do a part-time job in a firm earning monthly 100 rupees, which I stopped as my wife has now started working. Thus, my total monthly income is around 500–600 rupees. I have seven members in my family. Frankly speaking, it is impossible to make two ends meet."

Actually, some leaders were qualified to have better-paid jobs than the trade union work they were doing. For instance, the INTUC's leader who made the above statement was holding an M.A. degree. Likewise, the head of Majur Mahajan had an M. A. degree and a Bachelor's degree in law, and the leader of HMS was a science

[7]The interviews were conducted between December 1982 and November 1983.

graduate and had undergone a short training course in labor relations at Harvard University, USA.

Irregular Working Hours & Disorganized Personal Life

The leaders' personal lives were highly disorganized. Their followers often bothered them any time at any place. Without fixed hours of working they could not enjoy holidays or pay enough attention to their families. Still worse, if the workers felt that their problems were not solved satisfactorily they would blame their leaders, often making wild allegations against them. Some leaders, therefore, complained that the workers treated them as their '*Naukars*' (servants).

Not surprisingly, most leaders considered their job as thankless. It is, however, amazing that despite all these difficulties, they had displayed a life-long commitment to the cause, as some of them continued to work in the field for more than 30–40 years. The perplexing question, therefore, is: What was the motive force behind their commitment to their role as trade union leaders?

Non-Monetary Rewards

Most of them took their work as a mission, considering the personal satisfaction of doing some altruistic work as their main reward, Besides, even though they did not get sufficient monetary reward, they acquired respect in society, motivating them to continue their work. For instance, the INTUC leader said: "Financially my position is not sound and yet I am elected as Joint-Secretary of Baroda City Congress (I/R), much against the wish of many powerful persons of the city, only because of my trade union work. Similarly, some of us got elected as municipal corporators or as members to the state legislative assembly (MLA), and one of us (a leader of the HMS) could become a Minister in the Government of Gujarat, mainly because of the trade union background." Indeed, when a trade union leader got elected as a municipal corporator or as a member of the state legislative assembly (MLA) his sphere of influence and recognition expanded, along with his capacity to help his workers. Thus, the intrinsic reward in the form of satisfaction of doing some philanthropic work and the extrinsic rewards such as social status, prestige, and political prominence, appear to be the main stimulants behind their trade union activities.

The Bosses & Deputies

Mostly, the full-time outside leaders are considered as a homogenous category; their internal differentiations are rarely noticed. In reality, however, a detailed scrutiny of these leaders demonstrates that the full-timers differ significantly in the sphere of their influence, in their social background, and in their role performance.

The heads of the city branches of their federations can be legitimately defined as the 'Bosses'. Generally, their unions and federations were known by their personal names. For instance, all the unions of Majur Mahajan were known in the city as Dahyabhai's unions, as he was the head of Majur Mahajan. Similarly, the unions of HMS were known mostly as Sanat Mehta's unions. Likewise, the BMS unions were known as Keshubhai Thakkar's unions, and the AITUC unions as Bhalchandra Trivedi's unions. These local bosses directed all the activities of their unions and acted as their spokesmen. Policy statements or press notes about their unions or federations were issued in their names. These bosses represented their respective federations while interacting with the government officers such as the collector or city police head or in important city-level meetings of all federations, for some joint action. They were also involved in other political or civic organizations. Dahyabhai Patel, the boss of Majur Mahajan, for instance, was a member of the senate (court) and syndicate (executive council) of the The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, and also a member of the governing board of Baroda Productivity Council, a powerful non-government organization, for a long period. Besides, they were also involved in the state or national level councils of their respective federations or political parties, and some held important offices in such councils. For instance, Keshubhai Thakkar, the boss of BMS, was the President of the Gujarat unit of BMS of which he was formerly the General Secretary. Similarly, Bhalchandra Trivedi, the AITUC boss, was the General Secretary of the Gujarat Council of AITUC and a member of its national executive. He was a Joint Secretary of the Gujarat Council of the Communist Party of India and the Secretary of its cell in Baroda district. He contested elections twice for the membership in the Gujarat state legislative assembly, though unsuccessfully. He visited the former USSR and former German Democratic Republic (GDR) as a representative of the AITUC. Likewise, Sanat Mehta, the HMS boss, was a prominent municipal corporator, and was elected as a local MLA, becoming cabinet minister, twice in the Government of Gujarat. He was later appointed Chairman of Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam Ltd. of the Government of Gujarat in early 1990s, and was also elected to Lok Sabha in 1996, acquiring considerable eminence both at the state and the national levels. Thus, the influence of the bosses invariably extended beyond the city, to the state level, and in some instances, even to the national level. On the

other hand, the deputies had limited influence only within the city, as two of them could become corporators in the Baroda Municipality. Since each federation had only one head, the bosses were in smaller number, in comparison to their deputies, as indicated by *Table 2*.

The influence of the bosses invariably extended beyond the city, to the state level, and in some instances, even to the national level.

The Socio-political Profiles

Table 3 gives an overview of the socio-political profile of the bosses and deputies.

Since Baroda has been a Hindu dominated city, the bosses and deputies were mostly Guajarati Hindus. One deputy, however, was a Malayali, and a couple was Marathi-speaking. All these leaders were males. In terms of caste, except one, all the bosses were from high castes, whereas half the deputies belonged to the middle or lower castes. The bosses were relatively older, had joined the movement at an early stage, and were, therefore, more experienced. More than half of the bosses (i.e., four out of six) did not have any previous employment experience. Their deputies, however, were relatively younger, late joiners, and recruited mainly from the working class background.

Table 2: The Number Unions & the Number of Bosses & Deputies in Each Federation

Federation	No. of Unions	No. of Outside Full-time Bosses	No. of Outside Full-time Deputies	No. of Outside Full-timers Total
AITUC	14	1	4	5
BMS	16	1	2	3
CITU	2	1	4	5
HMS	8	1	3	4
INTUC	7	1	2	3
Majur Mahajan (NLO)	17	1	4	5
Total	64	6	19	25

Note: The bosses were invariably the presidents of the unions, and the deputies were general secretaries or secretaries or joint secretaries or treasures.

The bosses were relatively better educated; five were graduates, two having a post-graduate degree. On the other hand, all the five leaders with only school-level education were the deputies. Politically, the bosses were more prominent than their deputies; all the six bosses had contested state or national level elections, while only four deputies had done so.

The bosses and the deputies performed several activities, having a division of work and differential location in the influence structure.

Main Role of the Boss

Resolving collective disputes regarding wage revision was an important activity of the leaders, since a trade union has to enter into a periodic contract on behalf of the workers with their employers. Before entering into such a contract the leaders had to do some groundwork, to assess the aspirations of the workers, and then to translate them into specific demands. The next task before them was to assign priority to these demands, keeping in view the employers' capacity and willingness to grant them. This role, being strategic and complicated, was performed only by the bosses. The INTUC boss stated: "By and large, we define certain demands as the main demands, and then we add a few extra demands with a clear understanding with our workers that the latter would be withdrawn in favor of the former at the time of negotiations so that there is some room for bargaining between us and the management."

Resolving collective disputes regarding wage revision was an important activity of the leaders.

Table 3: Classification of Bosses & Deputies According to a Few Selected Background Variables

Social Background Variables	Bosses	Deputies	Total
Religion			
Hindu	5	14	19
Muslim	1	1	2
Total	6	15	21
Mother Tongue			
Gujarati	5	8	13
Non-Gujarati	1	7	8

Social Background Variables	Bosses	Deputies	Total
Total	6	15	21
Caste			
Upper	5	8	13
Middle & Low	1	7	8
Total	6	15	21
Age			
High (50+)	6	4	10
Low (50-)	-	11	11
Total	6	15	21
Period of Joining The Movement			
Early (Before 1960)	5	6	11
Late (After 1960)	1	9	10
Total	6	15	21
Employment Experience			
Yes	2	8	10
No	4	7	11
Total	6	15	21
Education			
High (Above SSC)	6	10	16
Low (SSC or less)	-	5	5
Total	6	15	21
Contested Public Election At least Once (Parliament, Assembly, Municipality)			
Yes	6	4	10
No	-	11	11
Total	6	15	21

The AITUC boss highlighted difficulties involved in the process: "Most of the workers do not know their own salary grade, basic wages, other allowances, past pay-revisions, and so forth. The management would not oblige us by providing the information. Some of the workers having such data may not have sufficient evidence to support their claims. If, after some efforts, we locate a worker with the necessary information and sufficient proofs, he may not be willing to share the same, due to the fear of victimization by the management. But, what is more difficult is to persuade all the workers to arrive at some consensus upon demands. If the workers agree, then the management would not. Many management personnel refuse to cooperate. The

inevitable result is litigation. Some of the employers would not even accept the labor court's verdict and go up to the Supreme Court. Thus, it is a prolonged process."

Main Role of the Deputies

Many workers confront individual problems in their plants such as the disciplinary actions taken against them in the form of charge-sheets, or suspension/dismissal orders, or lay-off/retrenchment notices. Some workers also faced problems related to provident fund, gratuity, leave, promotion, Employment State Insurance (ESI) Scheme, accident benefits, and so on. These individual disputes were the life-line of any trade union. Some leaders complained that many workers came to them only for such problems. Otherwise, they avoided even becoming the members of the union. Technically, however, a union is supposed to take up such problems only of their members. But, no union could afford to refuse to serve the non-members. Otherwise, they feared, such workers would join the rival union. Therefore, such non-members having individual grievances were usually asked to pay the union fees for the whole year, plus the lump sum litigation charges ranging from 25 rupees to 250 rupees, depending upon the complication of the case. Besides, in some instances, they were also asked to contribute to the union a certain percentage of the benefits earned by them, after winning the case, due to the efforts of the union leaders.

Individual problems were mostly handled by the deputies.

Individual problems were mostly handled by the deputies, as 12 of them reported that they spent most of their time only in solving such problems. The bosses were rarely involved in such disputes, if the disputes were routine. The solution of the individual problems, however, also entailed a complicated process. Some of them were solved at the negotiation level, but most involved litigation. Even when a dispute reached the adjudication level, efforts were made to arrive at a compromise. Generally, in the cases of suspension or dismissal, both the union and the management would take an uncompromising stand. Because, in some cases such suspended or dismissed workers would be leading union activists, and, therefore, no union liked to 'sacrifice' their 'loyalists'. On the contrary, the management would not like to be soft with those workers, because they dreaded that such spongy approach could dilute the management's authority and set a bad precedent. Therefore, the litigation concerning such workers would drag on for quite some time. Consequent delay in the judgment would make some of these workers restless and compel them to compromise with the management, often against the wish of their leaders. As most of the victims would

find alternative jobs for survival, during the suspension period, they would hesitate to revert to their previous employer, due to the strained relationship. Paradoxically, a lump sum which they hoped to get in the form of provident fund, gratuity, and other arrears due to the settlement, provided them an additional incentive to rush for a compromise. The technical workers who were in much demand and had high wages (and, therefore, also attractive arrears) were more likely to do so. The INTUC deputy said: "These workers often come and tell us: *'Hamara 'Final' Karo, Hum Jata Hai'* (Settle my dispute, I want to quit). Managements would also happily cooperate to compromise, since they get rid of such disgruntled, 'union-minded' workers. Actually, they would 'trap' such 'union-minded' workers and then compel them to leave the job, first by provoking them through suspension notice or charge-sheet, and then tempting them by offering 'handsome' amounts in the form of notice-pay and other dues if they resign voluntarily. The management would also coax them to resign, by telling them that if they resign they would easily get another job, which would not be the case if they were dismissed. As a result, some of these workers would resign even before consulting us. Unfortunately, some of them are our own representatives."

Commonly Shared Activities

Some other activities, mentioned below, were shared by both the bosses and the deputies.

(i) *Workers' Domestic Problems*: Several leaders helped the workers in solving their domestic problems, such as the problems regarding illness, hospitalization, police or court cases, employment for their relatives, getting documents attested by appropriate legal authorities, and so forth. Five bosses and four deputies stated that they spent some time in helping the workers in such matters. Two deputies who helped the workers in such problems were municipal corporators.

(ii) *Welfare Activities for Workers*: Although all the federations claimed to have the overall welfare of the workers as their long-term goal, very few leaders spent time in welfare activities. Only two bosses and five deputies used to spend some time on welfare activities. One boss belonged to Majur Mahajan and the other belonged to HMS. From among the deputies four belonged to Mahajan and the remaining one to HMS. Of the six federations, only these two federations had undertaken some welfare activities for their members. HMS, devoted to the socialist ideology, had initially organized a few cooperative societies of the workers for different purposes, but became inactive later. Thus, Majur Mahajan

was the only federation which had a long tradition of welfare activities for its workers, due to its sound financial position as well as the Gandhian ideology. The leaders of other federations could not undertake such activities, as they did not have enough resources. They could not even publish news-bulletins for the lack of resources. Except Majur Mahajan, no other federation was able to publish its news-bulletin regularly. The HMS used to publish a fortnightly, but later it was discontinued.

(iii) *Workers' Education*: No leader made any direct effort to educate the workers in the ideology of their respective federations by conducting regular study circles. Only three bosses and three deputies spent some time in conducting workers' education classes in collaboration with the Workers' Education Board of Government of India. But, those were routine government-sponsored training classes in trade unionism, which had nothing do with their respective political ideologies.

(iv) *Political Socialization*: Nevertheless, their ideological pursuits were reflected in their talks and discussions with the workers while solving their individual or collective problems, and also in their public speeches on various occasions, including the gate meetings. The Mahajan (NLO) leaders, for example, invariably invoked Mahatma Gandhi's name in their talks, and emphasized the values of peace and non-violence. The INTUC leaders highlighted *garibi hatao* (removal of poverty) and the progressive policies of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, then leader of Congress (I/R). The BMS leaders used nationalistic sentiments, and appealed in the name of the nation and *Bharat Mata* (Mother India). The HMS leaders talked in terms of socialism and social justice. In contrast, the AITUC and CITU leaders, following radical leftist ideologies, discussed issues couched in the ideology of working class unity, class conflict, and class struggles. Moreover, their ideological commitments were also reflected in the selection of ideologically committed workers for being promoted to trade union leadership.

Also, both the bosses and deputies actively participated in the programs of the political parties with which their respective federations were associated and mobilized their followers from among the workers for several activities such as joining the processions, shouting slogans, carrying banners, distributing union's pamphlets, and pasting posters or painting slogans on the city walls. Further, the deputies and bosses also mobilized support of their workers for each other when they contested public elections. However, in such activities, the bosses would always remain in the forefront and the deputies would perform peripheral roles.

The Influence Structure

The distinction between the bosses and the deputies does not have merely taxonomical value, since the trade union leadership constitutes, what Merton calls, an influence structure, consisting of both the status hierarchy and flow of influence (Merton, 1968:441–74). The bosses were the top leaders of their respective federations. And the deputies intimately interacted with the bosses of their respective federations on a day-to-day basis on the one hand, and were also in close contact with the workers, on the other. Thus they were a crucial link between the bosses and the rank and file in the chain of influence. The messages flew downwards from the bosses to the workers and upward from the workers to the bosses, through the deputies. This is reflected in various activities of the trade union leaders requiring them to spend their time at different places such as (i) federation office, and (ii) factory.

(i) *The Federation Office*: Almost all these leaders spent most of their time in their federation's office, since it was the most convenient meeting place for all concerned. Both the bosses and deputies attended their federation offices regularly in the mornings (9 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.) and in the evenings (5 p.m. to 9 p.m.). In the federation office, the deputies would be busy listening to individual or collective grievances of workers. And the bosses would be drafting correspondence, including replies to charge-sheets given to the workers and similar legal disputes or conducting workers' meetings. During this time the bosses and the deputies would constantly interact with each other, mostly the deputies seeking guidance from the bosses and receiving instructions from them on various issues and transmitting the same to the workers. For the rest of the day, they would usually be busy visiting the factories or pursuing legal disputes, either at the conciliation office or at the labor courts.

(ii) *Factories and Conciliation or Adjudication Machinery*: All the leaders spent considerable time at the factories. Generally, the bosses attended negotiations at factory and deputies either accompanied them or looked after conciliation or legal matters. Interestingly, all the leaders did not visit the factories necessarily for negotiations with the managements. Often they went to the factories for addressing gate-meetings (the meetings held at the factory gate at the time of the change of shifts) and organizing other agitation activities. In the gate-meetings or agitation programs also the bosses would be more prominent mostly giving speeches and the deputies would look after the organizational or mobilization work as per the instructions of their bosses. The leaders of Majur Mahajan, however, hardly ever held gate-meetings, spending most of the time at factory for

negotiations, since they had a long tradition of harmonious relations with the managements due to their commitment to the Gandhian ideology of industrial peace.

The workers were also aware about the division of work among the bosses and deputies. Whenever they had any problem, initially they would approach the deputies, who were, not only easily available but also closer to them in terms of social status, since the deputies came from working class background. Thus the deputies constituted a crucial link between the bosses and the rank and file workers. As Merton (1968:466) has suggested, these persons in the adjacent strata of influence, who constitute a chain of influence, can be of critical significance for the flow of opinions, views, etc. from top to bottom and vice versa.

The deputies constituted a crucial link between the bosses and the rank and file workers.

Concluding Remarks

The foregoing analysis reveals that the trade union movement was mostly a function of (i) the specific socio-political milieu, and (ii) the state-centric legal framework, obsessed with industrial peace. The full-timers were too few to confront the gigantic challenges entailed in their task. The multiplicity of the unions and federations, caused by competitive polity and encouraged by the legal framework, disallowed the unions to be financially strong enough to recruit many full-timers, and also compelled the leaders to pay more attention to legalistic and bureaucratic activities, overlooking the cause of building a powerful working class movement. Unsurprisingly, they could inspire their unions to resist the introduction of anti-labor practices. Even so, despite their small number, the outsiders worked with remarkable zeal at the grass roots level, under daunting circumstances, dividing their work between the bosses and deputies. The two strata not only reveal a leadership hierarchy but also a chain of influence.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to all the full-time trade union leaders who provided him with valuable information. Thanks are also due to N. R. Sheth, A. M. Shah, D.L. Sheth, and Bhikhu Parekh for their valuable comments on earlier draft of the article.

References

Agarwala, Rina. (2013), Informal Labor, Formal Politics and Dignified Discontent in India, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Aggarwal R.D. (Ed.) (1972), Dynamics of Labor Relations in India: A Book of Readings. Bombay, Tata-McGraw-Hill.

Ahn, Pong-Sul. (2010), Growth and Decline of Political Unionism in India; The Need for a Paradigm Shift. Bangkok: ILO DWT for East and South East Asia and Pacific: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—asia/—ro-bangkok/—sro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_143481.pdf. Accessed on 2 March 2015.

Bhattacharjee, Debashish (1989), Evolution of Unionism and Labor Market Structure: Case of Bombay Textile Mills-1947–1985, Economic and Political Weekly. 24 (21): M67-M76.

Chakrabarty, Anjan & Aupkumar Dhar (2008), Labor, Class, and Economy: Rc-thinking Trade Union Struggle, Economic and Political Weekly, 43(22):73–81

Chaudhuri, Mrinal Datta (1996). Labor Markets as Social Institutions in India. IRIS India Working Paper No.10. Maryland: University of Maryland. http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnaby353.pdf. Accessed on 7 March 2015.

Clawson, Dan & Mary Ann Clawson (1999), "What Has Happened to the Union Movement: Union Decline and Renewal", Annual Review of Sociology, 25:95–119.

Karnik, V.B.(1978), Indian Trade Unions: A Survey, Bombay, Popular Prakashan. Kennedy, V. D. (1966), Unions, Employers and Government. Bombay, Manaktalas.

Merton, Robert K. (1968), Social Theory and Social Structure, (1968 enlarged edition), Amerind Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.

Mitchell, Richard, Petra Mahy and Peter Gahan (2014), "The Evolution of Labor Law in India: An Overview and Commentary on Regulatory Objectives and Development", Asian Journal of Law and Society, 1 (2): 413

Patel, Pravin J. (2011), "Trade Union Movement in a Princely State: Tradition, Industrialisation and Social Change", Contribution to Indian Sociology, 45 (1): 27–54.

Punekar, S.D. & S. Madhuri (1967), Trade Union Leaderships in India: A Survey. Bombay, Lalwani Publishing House.

Ramaswamy, E.A. (1971), "Trade Unions and Electoral Process: General Elections in a Working Class Area", Indian Journal of Industrial Relations, 7(2): 205–27.

———. (1972), "Mid-term Poll in a Working Class Constituency in Tamil Nadu", Economic and Political Weekly, 1025–28.

———. (1973), "Politics and Organized Labor in India", Asian Survey. 8 (10): 914–28.

———. (1974), "The Role of the Trade Union Leaders in India", Hunian Organization. 33(2): 163–72.

———. (1977), The Worker and His Union: A Study in South India, Bombay: Allicd Publishers.

———. (1988). Worker Consciousness and The Trade Union Response, Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Rothemund, Indira (1981), "Pattern of Trade Union Leadership in Dhanbad Coalfields", Journal of Indian Law Institute, 23(4): 522–46.

Sheth, D.L. (2003), "Growth of Communal Polarization in Gujarat: The Making of a Hindutva Laboratory?" in Sandeep Pendse (ed.) Lessons from Gujarat, Mumbai: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 34–43.

NR Sheth (1993), "Labor Relations in the New Economic Environment", Vikalpa, 18 (3): 3–11.

Shyam Sundar, K. R. (2008), "From Politics of Fragmentation to Politics of Expansion and Integration?" in Jhon Benson & Ying Zhu (ed.s), Trade Unions in Asia: An Economic and Sociological Analysis, Oxon, Routledge..

———. (2010) "Emerging Trends in Employment Relations in India", Indian Journal of

Industrial Relations. 45 (4): 585–95.

(2015), "Industrial Conflict in India in the Post-Reform Period: Who Said All Is Quiet on the Industrial Front?" Economic and Political Weekly, 50 (3): 43–53.

Sodhi, J.S. (2013), "Trade Unions in India: Changing Role and Perspective", Indian Journal of Industrial Relations. 49 (2): 168–84.

———. (2014), "Labor Law Reform in India", Indian Journal of Industrial Relations. 50 (1): 100–17.

Teitlebaum, Emmanuel (2009), "Was the Indian Labor Movement Ever Co-opted? Evaluating Standard Accounts", in Rina Agarwala and Ronald J. Herring (eds), Whatever Happened to Class? Plymouth: Lexington Books, 50–72.

Wiener, Myron (1962), The Politics of Scarcity: The Public Pressure and Political Response in India. Bombay, Asia Publishing House.